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June 19, 2018

The Honorable Jeffrey Sanchez  
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 243  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karen Spilka  
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 212  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Sanchez and Chairwoman Spilka,

On behalf of the Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS), I would like to thank you for your time and efforts in developing the FY 2019 state budget. The MDS represents approximately 80% of dentists in the Commonwealth and is the champion for oral health in the state.

According to a survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), periodontal disease affects nearly half of all Americans over the age of 30. Further, 70% of adults 65 years and older have a form of periodontal disease. The CDC found that periodontitis was highest in men, Mexican Americans, adults with less than a high school education, adults below 100% Federal Poverty Levels, and current smokers.<sup>1</sup> It is critical that the Conference Committee prioritize oral health care and reinstate MassHealth coverage for the treatment of periodontal (gum) disease in the final FY 2019 budget.

Periodontal disease refers to any infection of the structures around the teeth, which includes the gums, periodontal ligaments, and alveolar bone. Periodontal disease is irreversible, but it is controllable. If gum disease is untreated, it advances and causes damage to the bone tissue surrounding tooth roots. This is the primary cause of tooth loss, discomfort, loss of biting and chewing strength, gum tissue, and bad breath. It can also lead to inflammation in other parts of the body, which occurs because the bacteria that cause periodontal infections can travel via the bloodstream to other parts of the body. Scientific studies indicate that heart disease, osteopenia, osteoporosis, and diabetes are highly correlated with periodontitis and periodontal infection.

As a periodontist practicing in North Andover, I have witnessed firsthand countless patients who have delayed care due to the lack of MassHealth coverage for periodontal disease. When patients delay care, not only does the disease progress and become more difficult to treat, but they are more likely to lose teeth or develop other conditions due to the bacteria travelling through the blood stream. In my experience, the lack of MassHealth coverage for periodontal disease directly increases health care costs. This is because patients will seek care in emergency departments, need more comprehensive oral care due to the delayed treatment, or the disease worsens other existing health conditions.

Periodontal care is necessary for the proper diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of periodontal disease. More importantly, periodontal care is a priority for maintaining optimal systemic health. Periodontal maintenance is important for extending the lifespan of one's teeth, preventing gum disease, and is a priority for a healthy and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/periodontal\\_disease/?\\_ga=2.209368658.1931045147.1529412058-198342390.1529412058](https://www.cdc.gov/OralHealth/periodontal_disease/?_ga=2.209368658.1931045147.1529412058-198342390.1529412058)

beautiful smile. Coverage for the treatment of periodontal disease is critical to improving the oral and general health of the adult population.

**We urge the Conference Committee to reinstate MassHealth coverage for the treatment of periodontal disease.**

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Kevin Monteiro, MDS director of governmental affairs, at [kmonteiro@massdental.org](mailto:kmonteiro@massdental.org).

Sincerely,

Howard Zolot, DMD  
President  
Massachusetts Dental Society